



COMMITTEE FOR ACCURACY IN MIDDLE EAST REPORTING AND ANALYSIS

NORMAN FINKELSTEIN'S FRAUDULENT SCHOLARSHIP

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Campus anti-Israel activists copy many of their arguments from two main sources – MIT professor Noam Chomsky, and his acolyte Norman Finkelstein, a DePaul University political science professor who never misses an opportunity to inform readers that his parents were Holocaust survivors. For example, following the Palestine Solidarity Movement's conference in October 2004 at Duke University, the student paper published a column that included anti-Semitic slurs such as "Jews must own up to their privilege in America, and use it more wisely" and "the Holocaust Industry' uses its influence to stifle ... the Israeli-Palestinian debate." The student supported these canards by citing Finkelstein's book *The Holocaust Industry*.

Anti-Zionists and anti-Semites often reference Finkelstein's books despite the fact that they are marred by factual inaccuracies, omissions and selective mention of fact. Much of his work is seemingly shaped by his antagonism toward the Jewish establishment and his avowed anti-Zionism. Thus, he routinely accuses pro-Israel writers of being "frauds" and "plagiarists," and labels their work "hoaxes."

In his controversial book *The Holocaust Industry*, Finkelstein argues that "Jewish elites" have created an "industry" to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust as a ploy to extort money and to gain influence, as well as a tactic "to crush any dissent, any criticism, of the State of Israel." The *New York Times*' review of the book described its premise as a "novel variation" of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the fraudulent essay concocted in the late nineteenth century by the Czarist secret police which purports to uncover a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world. Accordingly, the *Times*' reviewer described Finkelstein as "juvenile," "arrogant," and "stupid" (Aug. 6, 2000).

In Finkelstein's portrayal no one "unerringly articulates" the Holocaust "dogma" more than Nobel Laureate and human rights activist Elie Wiesel, who is himself a Holocaust survivor. Finkelstein mockingly describes Wiesel as the "resident clown," and charges he is responsible for creating a "meaningless version of the Nazi Holocaust" and for only exposing "genocides that serve the interest of the US and Israel" (Salon.com, Aug. 30, 2000). While Wiesel's work on behalf of those suffering around the world is generally well-respected, Finkelstein denounces his lack of "humanitarian commitments," and his "shameful record of apologetics on behalf of Israel." A more mainstream view was expressed by Ted Koppel of ABC's *Nightline*, who called Wiesel "one of the most compassionate human beings alive." Koppel specifically praises Wiesel for showing as much compassion for other people as he does the Jews (April 18, 2002).

Other Jewish leaders are similarly slandered by Finkelstein. For example, he calls Abraham Foxman, who heads the Anti-Defamation League, "the Grand Wizard," a term typically reserved for a leader in the racist Ku Klux Klan.

Finkelstein on Israel

Finkelstein tries to convince readers that the "Holocaust Industry" exists as an ideological weapon to gain unqualified support for Israel against the Palestinians. He unconvincingly argues that both the Holocaust and Israel became important to American Jews only in 1967 because:

Israel now becomes the United States' strategic asset in the Middle East. It's safe to be pro-Israel. And suddenly American Jewry, Jewish intellectuals and so forth, become fanatical towards the State of Israel. It's one of the enduring ironies of the whole conflict. That of all the Jewish intellectuals who are now fanatical stalwarts of the State of Israel, until 1967 there were only two public Jewish intellectuals who are publicly identified as supporting Israel. There are only two. And they were Hannah Arendt ... the second one was Noam Chomsky.

Finkelstein's assertions are simply bizarre. In fact, many Jewish intellectuals supported the Jewish state before 1967.

Thus, Albert Einstein, perhaps the preeminent intellectual of the 20th century, co-wrote an article in the 1944 *Princeton Herald* strongly supporting a Jewish state:

In speaking up for a Jewish Palestine, we want to promote the establishment of a place of refuge where persecuted human beings may find security and peace and the undisputed right to live under a law and order of their making. The experiences of many centuries have taught us that this can be provided only by home rule and not by a foreign administration. This is why we stand for a Jewish-controlled Palestine, be it ever so modest and small. (*Jews Among the Nations*, pg. 137)

Several American-Jewish intellectuals were deeply involved in the Zionist movement even before the Holocaust. In 1915, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis wrote about the importance of a Jewish state for the Jewish people:

The glorious past [of the Jews] can really live only if it becomes part of a glorious future; and to this end the Jewish home in Palestine is essential. We Jews of prosperous America above all need its inspiration. (*Menorah Journal*, January 1915)

Even before Brandeis became chairman of the Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs, he proclaimed in a 1913 speech that "we should aid in the efforts of the Jews in Palestine. We should all support the Zionist movement." In many of his speeches in that period he stated "to be good Americans we must be better Jews and to better Jews we must become Zionists."

Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter also actively promoted the establishment of a Jewish homeland. In an article for the April 1931 *Foreign Affairs* magazine, he wrote that he supports a Jewish state:

not only as a Jew. But as one who believes in the wisdom of the policy embodied in the Palestine Mandate for the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine.

Finkelstein in particular singled out Norman Podhoretz, the former editor-in-chief of *Commentary*, as a Jewish intellectual who did not support Israel before 1967:

What is very striking is everyone says, everyone says Israel played no role in my life up until '67. . . . Take the editor of *Commentary* Norman Podhoretz. . . . He writes a famous memoir called *Making It*. I reread *Making It*. Israel gets exactly four words in the whole book, it's nothing.

Finkelstein is once again sloppy in his research. A full 10 years before the Six Day War, Podhoretz wrote a well-known article for the Zionist magazine *Midstream* about the importance of American Jews making the case for Israel. He wrote:

Failing active restraint by America, the Arabs will continue to provoke, and Israel, under the inalienable right of self-preservation, will be forced to move. It is in the interest of the United States to insure that justice is to be done to Israel, and American Jews, who should be alerted by their interest as Jews to the special danger of the situation in the Middle East. . . are the ones to make that point clear to their fellow Americans.

Support for Zionism by such luminaries as Brandeis, Franfurter, Einstein, and Podhoretz, all apparently missed by Finkelstein, exposes his shoddy research and proves just how unreliable he is when it comes to Zionism and its history.

Flawed Book

Just as inaccurate as the *Holocaust Industry* is Finkelstein's book *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*. Dedicated to the proposition that Israel and Zionism are illegitimate, the book relies largely on anti-Israeli secondary sources and virtually ignores contrary evidence.

For example, Finkelstein's chapter "Born of War, Not by Design," about the 1948 Palestinian refugees, relies almost exclusively on Benny Morris's book *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, which has been seriously challenged by mainstream historians for selectively using Israeli archival material. Finkelstein relies on information found in *The Birth*, but often distorts already questionable material. For example, Morris claims in one of his endnotes that Ben-Gurion said:

[a return] is out of the question until we sit together beside a [peace conference] table...and they will respect us to the degree that we respect them and I doubt whether they deserve respect as we do. Because, nonetheless, we did not flee en masse. [And] so far no Arab Einstein has arisen and [they] have not created what we have built in this country and [they] have not fought as we are fighting...We are dealing with a collective murderer.

Rather than checking the original source, Finkelstein distorts the secondary source. In order to demonstrate Ben-Gurion's "extreme" "racis[ism]," he shortens Morris's citation to read, "Arabs were not entitled to the same respect accorded to Jews because 'so far no Arab Einstein has arisen...We are dealing with a collective murderer.' "

Benny Morris himself has long been critical of Finkelstein's scholarly research as it relates to his [Morris's] work. He criticizes Finkelstein for "selectively quot[ing]" from his book and for not knowing "anything ...beyond what is found" in his books. His sources, according to Morris, are "dubious," and he adds that Finkelstein fails to marshal "sources or materials from elsewhere that could serve to contradict my findings" (*Journal of Palestine Studies*, Autumn 1991). According to Morris, "for Finkelstein the only good Israeli is an evil Israeli."

Finkelstein routinely compares Israelis with Nazis and told the *Jerusalem Report* that he "can't imagine why Israel's apologists would be offended by the comparison" (Aug 28, 2000).

While Finkelstein expresses nothing but contempt for Israel, he lavishes praise on the terrorist group Hezbollah. In a letter posted on his Web site he states, "I did make a point of publicly honoring the heroic resistance of Hezbollah to foreign occupation ...Their historic contributions are...undeniable." He appeared on the official Hezbollah television network al-Manar, because, he said, "If I'm willing to appear on CNN – the main propaganda organ for America's terrorist wars–why shouldn't I appear on al-Manar?"

Al Manar's expressed mission is to wage "psychological warfare against the Zionist enemy." Al Manar producers boast of creating programming to recruit Palestinian suicide bombers. In addition, Ibrahim Mussawi, director of English-language news for al Manar, in an interview with the *New Yorker's* Jeffrey Goldberg, labeled Jews "a lesion on the forehead of history." Al Manar TV was banned by European Union satellites for airing racist programming such as the series "The Diaspora" based on *The Protocols*.

Attacks on Pro-Israel Writers

Finkelstein routinely calls those he disagrees with "frauds" labeling their work "hoaxes." Alan Dershowitz, a renowned Harvard lawyer and author of the best selling book *The Case for Israel*, is his latest target. Finkelstein claims Dershowitz's book is "sheer, unadulterated, complete, total, comprehensive, from beginning to end, from the first uppercase letter to the last period, a complete fraud" (March 8, 2005, lecture at the University of Illinois Law School). He accuses Dershowitz of plagiarism and has said that Dershowitz "almost certainly didn't write the book and perhaps didn't even read it prior to publication." The allegations were investigated and rejected by former Harvard President Derek Bok. In an upcoming book on the Arab-Israeli conflict, Finkelstein was going to accuse Dershowitz of plagiarism, but, under threat of lawsuit, he was forced to omit the allegation from his book.

In March, CAMERA asked Dershowitz why he thought professors are reluctant to publicly defend Israel. He said they fear:

Finkelstein going all over campuses of the world making up stories about them. The whole Finkelstein-Noam Chomsky-Alex Cockburn attack team has succeeded in intimidating many young professors around the country and around the world. Because if you write a pro-Israel article or book, they will call you a plagiarist...They will make up quotes about you...The hit team claims that they already prevented and destroyed the reputations of two pro-Israel writers.

It's hardly surprising that Finkelstein's fabrications and attack strategy intimidate. All the more reason that the facts about his reckless charges be widely disseminated. Finally, the grossly flawed writings of the DePaul "professor" point to yet another example of the failure of the academic world to uphold genuine standards of scholarship—such as accuracy, truthfulness and rigorous sourcing.